

THE *Final Straw*

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world.

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ANTI-MILITARIST AND FEMINIST RESISTANCE IN AZERBAIJAN



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and anti-queer backlash in the Caucasus, in Eastern Europe, Turkey, and Russia. Can you tell us a bit about why you think this is an important event and what you hope that people will get from this chance to engage with activists from across those regions?

L: Yeah, it's in English because that's the language which I think all of us speak and understand. It's a lingua franca for us and for the countries like Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. We think not only in Azerbaijan, this attack on radical feminism is everywhere. But the same rhetoric is in Georgia, and this summer Pride in Tbilisi was crushed. A lot of conservative rhetoric from the government against feminist and queer people. It is the same in Turkey. Probably you know the situation in Russia where they just announced that LGBT groups are extremists. So it's not only in Azerbaijan, but it's all over the region. It's not the region, but it's also part of a global trend. That's what we are witnessing these days, so that's why we thought having conversations with researchers, with academics, with thinking and writing about anarcha-feminism could give some extra ideas to activists. Not only activists, among the most people who are researchers or connected to academia. We thought it would be nice to have this opportunity, to have a discussion together. It's also a nice opportunity to come together from different countries, just to discuss these things that are connecting us.

TFSR: How can listeners learn more about your struggle—maybe if you want to point to your blog or any social media presence that you have—and some of the thoughts or feminist anti-militarist activities going on in Azerbaijan and in the wider region? Obviously, there's participating in that Anarcha-Feminism in Troubled Times, if folks can. But are there other ways that listeners can support your work?

L: Yeah, support is always needed. If anyone wants to support us, we can share the link to our website where they can contact us. We go on to the same name on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, major social platforms that are very popular in the region. That's why we are using them. They can connect to us through any of them or through the contact section on our blog. We are very responsive. Anyone who wants to get in touch, have a talk, anything. We're open to any ideas, any inquiries. It's not only us doing this. I can share with you some links to other people that they can follow from Azerbaijan, especially.

TFSR: Well, Lala, thank you so much for having this conversation and for having it in English. I really appreciate it. And for all the work that you do, and we'll definitely keep in touch. Let me know if you need anything else. Okay?

L: Thank you again for inviting me, it's very interesting. Thanks a lot.

This week on the show, you'll hear an interview with Lala an anarchafeminist in the Azerbaijani group Feminist Peace Collective about the recent war against and expulsion of ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, about the Aliyev regime and patriotic elements in Azerbaijan's reaction against anti-militarist voices, conspiracy theories and real critiques of non-profit NGO's versus grassroots lgbtq+ and feminist organizing, and other topics. You can learn more about Lala's group at **FeministPeaceCollective.Com**.

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tries that aren't one of those two. The country's already been hamstrung for 30 years by some of those blockades, but it would further restrict people's movement, as well as the passage and transit of goods, fuel, food, and such. What do you see as the next steps of the Azerbaijani state in this war with Armenia?

L: It's very hard to say because just yesterday the Armenian prime minister and Azerbaijani president issued a joint statement, which is unprecedented. We never witnessed any joint statements. When they exchanged the prisoners of war, and then, if I'm not mistaken, Armenia withdrew its candidacy to some UN event in 2026 in favor of Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan also withdrew a candidacy for something else. This is a very a symbolic and unprecedented thing that we have never seen before. Maybe in the 90s, immediately after the first conflict, some of these things happened. But after that, this is the first time. And a lot of speculation is now going on that a peace agreement is expected between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It's really hard to predict anything these days and to say how it goes. But one thing that is really clear to me is that Armenians being enemies will continue. To be honest, I don't see how the government will de-escalate this rhetoric, the nationalistic rhetoric of hating Armenians. It's not only the government's task of de-escalation, it's among the people. It's not just totally based on hatred, of course. It's a very complicated situation among the population. And we don't know, maybe it will change easily if the government stops this hateful discourse. It's hard to say. But there is a very negative attitude in society. Even if the government started to de-escalate, we don't know whether they will be successful. Basically, my position is that it's unclear.

Also, the President yesterday announced that on February 7th there will be presidential elections, which is also really ridiculous. It's extraordinary. It's just in two months. It's not even enough to prepare to make a campaign. What's gonna happen after the elections and how things will change, we don't know.

TFSR: Does that seem like just a way for him, riding high on nationalist fervor, to further consolidate and concretize institutional power for another four or five years?

L: Yes, it's very symbolic for him to get the mandate, and he's very popular now. Because he won the war, and returned this territory, so obviously, he will win. There's no need to falsify elections, he will win it without any problem. He's very popular. For him, it's very symbolic to get this legitimate mandate. What will happen after that? It's hard for me to say.

TFSR: Shifting to the end of the conversation, Feminist Peace Collective is hosting an upcoming event called Anarcha-Feminism in Troubled Times. It's an online event on December 19th with Dr. Chiara Bottici, conducted in English, which is framed around the conversation about anti-feminist

against the Gülenists happened in Turkey, the same followed in Azerbaijan. But now I think the arrest of Gubad and linking him to Gülen was pure conspiracy. There were people who were connected to Gülen, and I don't remember whether they were arrested, but they were fired from their government position. But with Gubad that was a different situation. He has no connections to that. It's pure conspiracy. The government uses this type of external enemies to justify this arrest, saying that, again, these people want to destabilize the country or they're plotting against us, against our stability. This is how they are connected.

TFSR: Your latest article on repression since the last war with Armenia and the expulsion of the population of Artsakh names Ulvi Hasanli, Mahammad Kekalov, and Sevinj Vagifqizi as among opposition figures who've been arrested. In addition to the written attacks on your collective in the media, can you talk about the repression that your collective and other opposition, such as the folks that I just named, have faced?

L: Yes, this is the most recent arrest of journalists, and they are now detained and under trial. This is very new, and this attack was connected to USAID and US. There was a huge escalation between Azerbaijan and the United States. Only now, in the last few days, it started to de-escalate because there was O'Brien's visit to Baku yesterday. The government media immediately changed the rhetoric, but before that, all those people were arrested just because they were getting funds from the USA because literally there's no other grant mechanism in the country. Then the US Embassy was attacked again. There was a US alumni meeting, which was labeled as an "agents of US" meeting, and they had to cancel that meeting. It's very paradoxical and funny that half of the Azerbaijani government was US-educated people, and still says the government does such absurd things by labeling the US-educated alumni as agents. But this is a recent attack, and it was labeled under two umbrellas. All government media mentioned that these people are spreading radical feminist idea and no-war ideas, which are supported and financed by the US (again, I'm repeating myself) to destabilize the country. This is the most recent attack. Occasionally they have arrested some activist people for a very short period, which we call administrative arrest for 15 days or 30 days. But this is something huge, which we haven't witness for a while. Again, there was another backlash, which was at the end of summer, which I talked about on public TV. They were labeling us as US-backed supporters of Armenia. This is what's happening. This is the most recent backlash from the government on opposition groups.

TFSR: Okay, so the evictions of Artsakh and Nagorno-Karabakh don't feel like the final resolution to the military struggle between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Aliyev regime has talked about claiming "sites of Azerbaijani cultural significance" that lie within the recognized borders of Armenia, including the capital of Yerevan, and also seems to be moving in concert with Turkey to cut off all of Armenia's border access with neighboring coun-

Lala: Hi, I'm Lala. I come from Azerbaijan, Baku, and I'm using she and her pronouns.

TFSR: Many listeners to the show will not know much about Azerbaijan, such as myself. I wonder if we could speak a little bit about the country in a very basic manner of introduction. My very basic understanding is that the country is in the South Caucasus, populated mostly by Azerbaijani Muslims, and that Azerbaijan is a part of the former Soviet Union that has been under the rule of the New Azerbaijan Party since a coup in 1993. The government has stayed in the hands of the Aliyev family during this time, despite a few other coup attempts. Some writings that I've seen online have noted that using measures such as freedom of speech or ability to oppose the ruling party, or the existence of fair elections, by using those measures, Azerbaijan is considered to be a pretty unfree and autocratic country. Do these generalizations seem true? Could you maybe elaborate a little bit on some of the lasting foundations of the Azerbaijani Republic as you've experienced it?

L: Of course, I think the generalization is mostly true. It's a country located in the South Caucasus bordering Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Turkey and Russia. Basically, the region is squeezed between the three big powers, let's say—the former empires. And we used to be part of the Soviet Union. Before that, we were part of the Russian Empire. In 1991, we gained independence. I think it wasn't the New Azerbaijan Party who did the coup (there was a mess during that period), but they never came to power.

They used a different type of coup and all this political mess in the country as an opportunity to come to power, and then other coups were organized against them that were never successful. Since then, yes, they are in power. First, it was Heydar Aliyev, who is the father of the current president, and now it's Ilham Aliyev in power. It's a pretty autocratic and dictatorial regime, which suppresses a lot of political freedoms. Of course, no fair elections, and very low level of freedom of speech, and occasional crackdowns on civil society and activists. So this is pretty much the summary of the political situation.

TFSR: So Aliyev was a part of that coup in 1993 and later formed the New Azerbaijan Party, which his son is in control of?

L: The father of Aliyev is part of the so-called Soviet *nomenklatura*. He is an old bureaucrat. He was a part of the Soviet KGB, but he was not a participant of the coup. The coup was organized by the military and military generals, who were fighting during the first Karabakh war in the 90s between Armenia and Azerbaijan. These people tried to do a coup against the president who was in power back then. Aliyev just used the situation to come to power, but not as a part of the coup, not as a part of the military. He was a politician back then and he had some political posi-

tion already back then in independent Azerbaijan. Basically, the president stepped down, and Aliyev became the de facto president, then they made the elections and he became a president. That's how there was a coup that he was never a part of. At the same people actually tried to make a coup against him around the mid-90s, '95 I think. But they were not successful.

TFSR: Thank you very much for explaining that.

We had been introduced by a mutual friend because they knew that you were involved in the Feminist Peace Collective. I wonder if you could speak a little bit about what that project is, and what brought you to organize it, what the goals of the project are.

L: Yes. We started to organize around 2020 before the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But then the war became a trigger. It very much radicalized a lot of young people in the country, people who were engaged in liberal NGO projects and civil society activists. They started to turn to more grassroots politics and grassroots activism and lost all their faith in this type of NGO work. Because for a long time, a lot of young people—not just young, but I will be referring to youth groups—were engaged in peacebuilding activities between these two countries. People believed that this would lead somewhere, that the peacebuilding would give some fruit, but it never happened. This process that started in the late 90s, after the first war, never gave the expected results. Then a lot of people, including myself and my collective, started to question why this happened, and a lot of disappointment came. Our project started more on, I would say, a liberal line, then it turned into something else. We turned to more radical politics, and currently, I think most of us in the group identify as anarcha-feminists. We are identifying ourselves against this liberal politics that's going on in the civil society circumstances. Not the whole country, of course. However, the structure of civil society is shaped by these ideas.

So this is the context of how the group and the idea emerged. The war triggered it. We turned to different literature and different politics, trying to find ourselves and give some meaning to our activism and political actions. And then we decided to come together in a collective, which is built on feminist and radical peace ideas. That's why we put the name Feminist Peace Collective. That's how it's emerged. Since then, we have been trying to do mostly discursive work, I would say, because all of our activities are around publishing—publishing different types of texts and podcasts. Also, we organize events when we are in the country. Right now, some of us are out of the country for doctoral education. When we are all in the country, we're trying to do some events and discussions to the extent that it's possible, of course. It's not always possible to organize because of security issues, because of the danger to political activists.

TFSR: Thank you. It's interesting coming from a position of civil society. If you are coming from more of an NGO approach, as a lot of people probably were until they found that that wasn't working, there are a lot of assump-

It's extremely hard, and in recent years activism around trans people is increasing. But Azerbaijan is the most homophobic country in Europe. You can imagine how difficult it is to be queer, a trans person. The situation with cis-hetero women is a bit better because, of course, they are oppressed on a different level, but a bit better in comparison to the queers. It's not that easy to be a woman because many people would argue here that they have the right to participate in public life. It's not that you can't get an education or you can't work or you are deprived of this type of right. It's not about that, but the public sphere for a woman and equality is extremely limited because it's a very patriarchal mindset, which considers women as not capable of being engaged in politics and public life. You're just doing your family business. This is the approach. In recent years, violence against women increased. We are registering increased femicide numbers. This is the everyday life in the country.

TFSR: Interestingly, the Aliyev regime supporters are wheeling out some antisemitic conspiracy theories about George Soros as a globalist destabilizer of traditional society and on behalf of finance in the West. That's a pretty common trope around the world at this point. Also, it was mentioned in an article that similarly covered the response in the Azerbaijani media and by the Azerbaijani government to opposition to the war that jailed opposition personalities Gubad Ibadoghlu and his daughter Zhala Bayramova, who were arrested in July and allegedly tortured, were accused of having supposedly links to the Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, a US-based opponent of the Erdoğan regime in Turkey that's being accused of having conducted this 2016 attempted coup within Turkey. And I don't know if this is another piece of the mix—Turkey has not officially recognized its genocide of the Armenian people in 1915. Gülen however, has. I'm sure there are lots of things going on there that I don't understand about Gülen's politics. But could you talk a bit more about some of these other conspiracies that get wheeled out by the regime to consolidate power?

L: Of course. A lot of conspiracies. People in Azerbaijan love conspiracies and truly believe in them. About the antisemitism and antisemitic conspiracy about Soros, it's very interesting to know that Azerbaijan positions itself as an ally of Israel, and most of the weapons are bought from Israel. The official narrative is that this is one of the countries with Muslim heritage... It's not a Muslim country. It's very secular and very oppressive against religious Muslim communities but has Muslim heritage, with a majority Muslim population. The country has great relationships with Israel, so they are very careful. Whenever an attack on Soros happens, it's just never about him being a Jew or about financial capital, etc. Of course, I understand that this conspiracy comes from there, but there is this weird dynamic about Azerbaijan with this conspiracy.

As for Gülen, Erdoğan is the biggest supporter of Aliyev and the war during 2020. As soon as their relations with Gülen turned bad and oppression

what they want to do. They don't ask the locals what they need support for. Maybe I don't need support for building a bridge, but I need something else, right? It's not only coming with this type of community project, it's come with a lot of value-based things gender equality, democracy-building, elections, et cetera, et cetera.

Many people who will listen and say what's wrong with that, especially after the Soviet oppression. Many people, since we were oppressed by different Empires — they were oppressed by Russia— so many people saw US as a dream, the American dream of 90s, that this is the savior, and building democracy is the right way. Many people were not questioning what's wrong with building a democratic state or state-building institutions like elections. This part is not a conspiracy. This part is a reality that peripheral countries experienced, especially our periphery, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and still continue to experience, to be honest. It's challenged by some people, but this challenge is not very strong. The donors represented by the USA, EU, or this type of organizations are very hegemonic, and they can dictate their own agendas. But what the government does is they turn it into a very conspiracy type of thing that any groups or activists or NGOs, whoever is taking money from them, they are working for the destabilization. They basically turn it into a very weird conspiracy that if not for these organizations, there wouldn't be any dissent in our countries. That's the part that should be opposed and debunked. It's not like that. Queer people are living and being oppressed in your country, or there's a lot of femicide, gender-based violence, women who are living with this oppression, or people who are not just satisfied with the politics that's going on in the country who just want to politically organized and do their activism around it. The government frames this as if feminism is something foreign to our society and exported from the West, which is actually wrong because in this case any ideas that are exported from the West, including their traditionalist neoconservative rhetoric, which is a complete copy/paste of, for example Trump. It is not different from what he's saying. This is the conspiracy part of it, I think, since the feminist and queer groups are the most organized in comparison to other leftist groups, which are not really active. Some people are engaged in left-wing activism, but it's not really organized. But feminism and queerness can be targeted because it's organized under one name. That's why we became the main targets.

I don't know whether I covered all the points of your questions. If you still have something to follow up on, just go ahead.

TFSR: So I guess with the way that the power structures are representing difference from their ideological perspective in people's lived lives, for instance with queer and trans folks. Obviously, if the government is saying that this is a byproduct of this outside attempt to change the way that our society operates and that they are the arbiters of what is natural and what is imposed. How is it for queer and trans folks, for instance, or folks that are gendered, female, how is living in Azerbaijan in general?

L: It depends, of course, on the gender. The worst position is that of trans people.

tions about how society operates, how power operates, and how change occurs. Please correct me if I'm wrong on this, but rather than assuming that the levers of power were available to you if you just applied enough pressure from within the civil organ of society, against the government, that change would occur, that you—those of you that identify as anarcho-feminists—decided to have a conceptualization of society and state structures and capitalism being in opposition. Is that why you've moved towards education programs, including criticizing the state and capitalist relations?

L: Yes, that's a very good observation. That was exactly the case. When the war happened, we saw a lot of problems with the structure of civil society and how this structure does not allow you to operate for the goals and hopes—maybe we were naive at that period of time, but we have some hopes and aims and goals in our work towards peace. Then you understand that this is not the way how it works and it's actually impossible. Then you start to question, okay, what was wrong? What did I or we as a collective do wrong? That's where you turn to some different types of literature to find some answers. We started to discuss among ourselves. It's very interesting that when we started to reflect further to see that exactly in the same period of time our souls separately but at the same time collectively started to change. You observed it pretty well. That's what happened.

TFSR: You used the word anti-militarist when describing the position of the collective. Could you put this in comparison in contrast with the term pacifist? Are they the same thing for you? How do they differ?

L: Yes, that's a great question. We are not pacifists. We also feel a need to reconceptualize the understanding of peace and bring more radical, I think, understandings of peace or everyday understandings of peace. Because we don't identify as pacifists, we believe that when you're oppressed to the level that violence is the only solution to respond to that oppression, then that's basically what you do. For example, colonialism is a very simple, well-known example. If you have this type of structure, you don't have any peaceful means to overcome the structure. Or very bloody dictatorships, right? It's really hard to overcome them by peaceful means. We don't identify as pacifists. That's why we put anti-militarist. But to be honest, we still identify as anti-militarist, of course, against the militaristic system and against the armaments.

Even during the war in Ukraine, that also made us question that anti-militarist position. When you're attacked by a power that's much, much stronger than you and without some military support you'll never be able to overcome it. Where do we stand on that anti-militarism? This event also made us question that position as well. I believe these positions should be flexible and adjustable from context to context. It shouldn't be rigid positions that we are anti-militarist and that's a no. I think the social relations and the political context that we live in are so complicated that adjustments and contextual approach to your position are required. I am not afraid to use this word.

TFSR: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Thanks for explaining that.

I recently spoke with an anarcha-feminist from Armenia who said that she hadn't really been aware of opposition in Azerbaijan to the expulsion of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh following the long siege by the Azerbaijani military. But she did note that Azerbaijan is a dictatorship and that opposition would be difficult. Could you talk a bit about how the state-allied media covered the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh during the Second War and the siege and the invasion versus what you know has actually been happening? How popular would you say the military actions of the government were among the Azerbaijani population?

L: I listened to that interview, and I was surprised that she didn't encounter the opposition voices from Azerbaijan because there was a whole no-war group. I am not calling them a movement because they never turned into a strong movement for the obvious reasons of a very oppressive political system. But among these peace activist circles, or the people who were engaged around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this was a very well-known fact. But then again, after that interview, I started to question myself—maybe we were in some bubble and this information never reached out of that bubble. So these voices existed, and they made a lot of noise. They are the most oppressed group right now in the country because all the conventional opposition, who was before the war against the regime, during the war they started to support it. Because this is a truly complicated conflict. It's very similar to the Israel-Palestine conflict. It's a very old conflict. It's a century-long which has nothing to do in this sense with current regimes. It's older than them, so it's traumatizing for both societies. That's why there was a very big concern and consensus among the Azerbaijani population that this isn't just war. Because in the 90s, they were traumatized. Some parts of Azerbaijan were occupied, which is outside of the Nagorno-Karabakh disputed region, and a lot of people became refugees. That's why it's a very traumatizing experience for Azerbaijanis. Naturally all of them supported this war. They were only a very small dissent in the country, which basically united under the slogan No War. That's why it was called that. It happens to be that this group also consisted of feminist and left-leaning youth activists. That's why they have turned into the main target of the government.

Because the conventional opposition never questioned this war. That's why I was a bit surprised that she said she never saw this opposition because it was, I think, very prominent among Armenians and Azerbaijanis. A lot of texts were circulating around, and a lot of cross-border initiatives together with Armenians and Azerbaijanis peace statements and calling to stop the war were issued during the 2020 war.

But again, I'm questioning even right now myself, maybe we were truly in the bubble, and it never reached the wider circles. Of course, we couldn't have reached the wider societal circles, but I thought that among the political activists, it was well-known that there are people opposing war.

Coming to your question about media coverage, of course, media is most

down the social fabric. This wasn't just directed around specifically queer issues, or I guess "gender," but I guess feminism falls to them under the same umbrella of challenging natural orders of things. As you point out, these right-wing and traditionalist positions are wielded by the state and industrial actors in Azerbaijan, who are literally paid, and receiving money, doing business, with the US and Western countries. And that the stability that, for instance, my government, as someone from the US, seeks is directly related to domestic repression of anti-authoritarian voices such as yours in Azerbaijan. It's a position often parroted by vulgar anti-imperialists in the West also. I wonder if you can add a bit on this point. Can you talk about these tropes about the Western NGOs, maybe the realities of some of the elements of Western aid also, the status of grassroots feminism, and the ability of queer people to live lives out in the open in Azerbaijan? Sorry, it's a big question.

L: I'll try to break it down somehow and be brief on each point. About the structure of this, how it basically works, during the Soviet era, we never had this NGO concept or civil society concept because it was against the ideology in the country back then. But after that, in the 90s, not only post-Soviet space, but also post-socialist space—let's say current Balkan countries who were not part of the Soviet Union, but were in the socialist bloc—all these countries were flooded with the liberalization agenda. A lot of funds came into the region, Western funds, and the agenda was liberal peace-building, which is very equal to state-building, basically. You're transitioning from authoritarianism and dictatorship, a socialist past into the market economy, into capitalism, into liberal democracy, and building your state around it. The whole NGO-building stuff—the NGO market, I would say—started in the 90s under this umbrella, and it pacified a lot of people. It pacified the whole generation of activists because everyone turned to NGO structures and were working around NGO structures. I think now is the period when we are witnessing these ideas seriously collapsing, and people are seriously questioning whether this structure of donors coming with their own agenda for our region makes sense or not.

Here, I will turn to your question about the position of vulgar anti-imperialists in the West. We should distinguish reality from conspiracies. When we say that some Western NGOs are coming with their own agenda, it doesn't mean that it's a conspiracy. They're coming with their own values. Sometimes they're coming with the reality where they dictate the terms of the grants, the terms of the projects that are going to be implemented in the country. And people right now, including myself, are questioning this—to what extent you have a right even to come and to dictate your own terms of the actions because they are the setting agenda in this country, what to do or what not to do. It's not about destabilizing some regimes. It's not about that. It's just the structures have their own understanding of the world and their own understanding of political action and civil society. They come and say "Look, we have funds for this and only for this." They don't ask the locals

L: Yes, exactly.

TFSR: I'll link some of this in the show notes for people to read a little bit more about that.

Just before the resumption of the hot war around Nagorno-Karabakh, your collective published the text whose English title is "From bloody February to bloody Septembers or why as victims we can still be aggressors," which I found quite moving. Also, apparently, so did the Azerbaijani state. Can you talk a little bit about the text and the response to opposing war that you and other activists have received from the government and from nationalist elements?

L: Yes, we were trying to respond to the claims and questions from not only the government but also from Azerbaijani society, which widely believes that they are victim in this conflict. We were trying to argue and to clarify our positions that once you were a victim doesn't mean that you will not become an aggressor. It doesn't immune you from aggression, from pressure, from any injustice. That's why telling that once we were victims, and whatever we're doing right now is justified, and whatever we are doing is not aggression, and everything is just is wrong. This was the argument in a nutshell of that article, and of course, some people in the society found it interesting. I was reading some comments on the article. From the government's side, after the article about the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, they blocked our website in the country. Now without a VPN, you cannot access it in Azerbaijan. After the blockade article in August, a huge new campaign started against peace and no-war activists, especially because we issued the statement and then some groups in the country organized an event. After that a huge backlash started on the no-war and peace activists. The public TV and a lot of newspapers were publishing the attacks on this group calling us mainly traitors and agents of the West, of the US, not so much of Europe, but mostly the US and the West who wants to destabilize our country, and similar conspiracies.

TFSR: Or the defenders of Armenians or actors on behalf of the Armenian state, too.

L: Exactly.

TFSR: Making you internal enemies to the common good of the sovereign or whatever. One of the attacks that that was leveled at you all by the Azerbaijani regime against your challenge to the war drums, and which is frequently pulled out by the government and by reactionary press in Russia, as well as other post-Soviet states, is that the LGBTQ and "genderism" or "gender-ideology agendas" that are being pushed by Western nongovernmental organizations, such as ones run by George Soros, the Open Society Foundation, are doing so to undermine local sovereignty and to break

controlled by the government. However, there are also independent media groups and initiatives that are mostly operating through social media. Very recently, like a month ago, a very recent crackdown on them started. The state-controlled conventional media were covering the conflict from a propagandist point of view, supporting the government narratives. And I think most of the population supported it for the reasons I explained before. It wasn't that the government had to convince the population. The population was already convinced that this war was justified.

TFSR: I understand that. When you were saying the size of the anti-war statements and protests and such, was that during the Second Karabakh War, or was that visible just during the more recent siege and invasion that occurred within the last couple of months?

L: It was 2020 and during the last stage. There were also statements. One was by our collective, and there's a couple of others. Again, the same group of people who opposed the war in 2020 continued to write and oppose the siege during these last events. Just to generalize, during any escalation that happened after 2020 until up to now—so the siege was not the only one—the same group of people were opposing the military operation. And after 2020 some more people joined this group. I mean, the number of people who started to question the military actions increased in comparison to 2020.

TFSR: I guess we talked about your idea of peace in terms of pacifism versus anti-militarism. We talked about taking a position that is popular and in opposition to centers of power within society, such as the state and capital. Would you talk a little bit about the link that you see between feminism and peace or feminism and opposing militarism?

L: Yeah, that's a great question. I think feminism is not only about women's issues, which most people in our region and everywhere tend to believe. This is about all the structural inequalities and oppression that we are facing these days. It's not only about gender: It's about race, it's about class, it's about the position you're coming from. We can add a very long list of this type of oppression, right? If you're a feminist (I think you should be), it's a very normative claim, but how we understand if you want a peaceful society, if you have a utopia for everyday peace, let's say, then you're opposing injustices and inequalities. It comes not only from gender oppression, but it comes from many different types of oppression, coming from capitalism, coming from racial inequalities, and many other things. I think this is how we see the link between feminism, peace, and anti-militarism. Just advocating for women's rights and not, for example, thinking about queer people who are oppressed, for example, by women, by cis-hetero women in our society it's a big problem. The same applies to militarism. If you're a feminist activist, and you're just turning a blind eye to the war and the military structure that fuels the war. For example, Armenia and Azerbaijan, for 30 years, were arming and spending the big-

gest portion of their state budget to the armaments because they were preparing for war, especially Azerbaijan. So as a feminist activist, I think there is a need, and part of our activism is to talk about all of the injustice that we are facing in our society. I don't know whether this responds to your question, but that's how I see the link.

TFSR: Absolutely. That was what I was thinking, so we are on the same page.

Would you talk a little bit about the use of war by the Azerbaijani regime to rally nationalist pride, fortify an Azerbaijani ethno-national consciousness, and attempt to turn domestic frustration into hate of a national enemy? That's one of the classic anarchist critiques of militarism: This is what the state does to get all of its people on board, saying "You are all our people (some of you, especially). This is about the common hurt that we're all experiencing. Come, let's go smash the enemy." Does that seem it apply to how these last couple of military campaigns have been recruited? Or am I a little off?

L: No, absolutely. I think in the case of Azerbaijan, it's more visible because it's the nation who, I think, is primarily built on hating Armenia, as being anti-Armenian. What is to be Azerbaijani? It's not something very ethnic like with Armenians for example. This ethnic group has built a state. The nation and the ethnicity are somehow connected. If there are people who believe in this—I don't, and I'm trying to explain, but I do not believe in conflict of nation or ethnicity. But in the case of Azerbaijan, if we just come to this point of view, what is ethnicity is very complicated. It's a very mixed group of people with Turkic, Persian, Caucasian (not the American use of the word but people from the Caucasus). So this type of mixed-origin group, and then there is a group collective name, which is linked to the territory called Azerbaijan. Then the nation forms. And the nation started to form really the first time, I think, used as the name of the nationality during the Soviets, and then after the collapse of the USSR the nation-building started to happen. It was very much connected with the first Karabakh war with all the problems and traumas related to that. Then every year, with the passing of time time, this nationhood was consolidated and built around Karabakh and the loss of Karabakh and being basically anti-Armenian. This is what makes you Azerbaijani. That's why I think the anarchist critique is very reasonable in the context of Azerbaijan. The state consolidated the nation around this idea of the "other"—the enemy, Armenian.

TFSR: Another element of possible reason for the Aliyev regime evicting the Armenians from the Artsakh Republic seems to be a contract with the Anglo-Asian mining company for about \$3 billion to extract gold, an investment that profits companies invested in by members of the now two-generation ruling Aliyev family. Is this connected to the so-called eco-activist blockade of the Lachin corridor? I wonder because the conversation that I had with the comrade from Armenia didn't really touch on this. But I

remember hearing about it reported on Popular Front in a discussion. The blockade was expanded based on the government of Azerbaijan responding to claims by eco-activists, and then the military stepping in. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the profit to the family and the rouse of the eco-activists.

L: Maybe I will start with the mining company. Of course, this interest of the mining company is there, and the interest of the capital is there, and the family is basically controlling the economy in the country. But my idea about this is that even if that territory would have no capitalistic interest for the family or any companies, still making war and regaining control of the territory would be important for Azerbaijan and the Aliyev regime because it's about sovereignty, which for me, of course, is related to capital. But here again, I'm just thinking that if it does have the capitalistic interest, it's not only about that interest. It's good for them, of course—the opportunity to make more business—but it's not directly linked to that. It's linked to the sovereignty and extending this sovereignty over the territory that's under your control, basically. Even if there wouldn't be a desert without anything, they would be fighting. It's also about national identity. It has a symbolism for nationalism, consolidating people around this idea. Even though there are, of course, a lot of capitalistic interests there, that's not for me the primary cause or the primary reason for war happening.

Coming to eco-activists, I think they are not really related to this Anglo-Asian mining company because of what the government did. They have a lot of GONGOs, the governmental NGOs, which basically are puppets. Whatever they will be asked for by the government, they will do. They asked these so-called eco-activists to block the corridor from Armenia to Karabakh under the pretext that in Karabakh some mines or sites are exploited, which are harmful to the environment. It's so interesting that a few months after the blockade, a protest and uprising is happening in another region of Azerbaijan, which is close to Nagorno-Karabakh, but it's not a conflict zone. It's an Azerbaijani village where mining is happening, and people are complaining that there is a poisonous lake where all the waste from the factory or the mining sites are dumped. This is poisonous for the village, and they are protesting. The government sends a huge police force to that village, and eco-activists are nowhere to be seen. They are not even talking about it, the eco-activists who were at the other location. The others who are independent, who were in the activism for a long time, of course, were talking about it. But obviously, they were not participating in the blockades of the corridor. This was happening at the same time. It was so visible that the absurdity of the picture and the context is visible that the people who were protesting for environmental reasons in Nagorno-Karabakh were not visible when real environmental disaster was happening in the country. This is the story.

TFSR: That other uprising that you're describing, I think your collective wrote about it in some of your statements, is in Gadabay. Is that right?